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Improving Post-Secondary Employment Outcomes for Individuals with Emotional or Behavioral Disorders

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**Improving Post-Secondary Employment Outcomes for Individuals
with Emotional or Behavior Disorders**

by

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A Starred Paper

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St. Cloud State University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Students with disabilities have worse outcomes as adults than their non-disabled peers due to deficits in one or more of the following areas: 1) academics, 2) behavioral skills, 3) emotional skills, 4) social skills, 5) self-determination, or 6) independent living skills. For students with emotional or behavioral disorders (EBD), these outcomes are particularly troubling. Of the 13 major disability categories, students with EBD report the lowest levels of overall life satisfaction. This is due in part because, as adults, individuals with EBD have lower rates of post-secondary education enrollment than their peers. They also have higher rates of unemployment and job termination as compared to other peers with disabilities (Harrison, State, Wills, Custer, & Miller, 2017).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA or IDEA) of 2004 guarantees a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for all students with disabilities in order to provide them equal access to education (Harrison et al., 2017). An individualized education plan (IEP) is created for each student that outlines present levels of functioning, goals, accommodations, and services. To help establish a successful transition from school to adult life, IDEIA 2004 also mandates that the IEP include a transition plan for students who are 16 or older. Case managers are expected to work with students, parents, and other stakeholders to establish meaningful goals for post-secondary employment, education and training, and independent living in addition to creating a plan for reaching these goals (Harrison et al., 2017). In Minnesota, this process begins when the child is in 9th grade.

Despite this mandate, post-secondary transition outcomes for students with EBD are grim. Information from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) indicates that 55.8% of EBD students had graduated from high school, 21.8% had enrolled in post-secondary

education, and 35.5% had been unemployed at some point between high school and up to 8 years after high school (Carter, Trainor, Sun, & Owens, 2009; Sanford et al., 2011). This raises the question of how postsecondary outcomes for those with EBD can be improved.

Research Question

One research question guided the review of this literature:

1. What interventions and strategies can be used to improve post-secondary employment outcomes for individuals with emotional or behavioral disorders?

Focus of Paper

This paper focuses on strategies and interventions that can be utilized at the secondary education level by school staff and related service providers to improve the post-secondary employment outcomes for individuals with EBD. To find studies and information for this paper I primarily used the ERIC EBSCO database and searched several combinations of the following terms: 1) *EBD*, 2) *outcomes*, 3) *postsecondary*, 4) *emotional disturbance*, 5) *behavior disorder*, 6) *transition programs*, 7) *challenges*, 8) *transition*, 9) *disability*, 10) *employment*, and 11) *improve*. These searches yielded 18 relevant articles from various sources, including the *Council of Exceptional Children*, the *Journal of Behavioral Health Services and Research*, the *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders*, the *Journal of At-Risk Issues*, the *Journal of Employment Counseling*, *Educational Psychology in Practice*, the *Journal of Special Education*, *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, *Emotional and Behavioral Difficulties*, and *Teacher Education and Special Education*. The citations for each of the 18 articles were also examined for suitable studies, which yielded another five articles. The 11 articles that I ultimately chose to include in this review were picked because of their pertinence to my topic and date of publication.

The literature that is reviewed in Chapter 2 comprises 11 studies relevant to my research question. Each study is related to transition supports, employer, parent, and student perceptions, vocational education, availability of services, work outcomes, student knowledge of transition planning, or teacher training. I chose this topic because I work with high school students who have EBD, and I would like to be informed on how to best support them as they transition into their adult life.

Historical Background

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act was passed in 1975. This law required schools to provide a free and appropriate education (FAPE) for students with disabilities. The first case related to this law, *Board of Education of the Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley*, was heard by the Supreme Court in 1982. The issue at the center of this case was whether or not the Hendrick Hudson Central School District provided a reasonable FAPE to a student with a disability. As a result of this case, the court created a two-part test to determine if schools were meeting the law requirements for FAPE. Part of this test included whether or not a student's IEP was written such that the student was provided an educational benefit (Freeman, Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2019), and the expectation moving forward was that schools would provide FAPE to students with disabilities for them to gain the skills necessary to have academic and behavioral success.

Despite the additional laws mandating that schools provide special education services for students, such as the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1990, the Peacock Hill Working Group met in 1991 to address the inadequate programming and outcomes for students with emotional or behavioral disorders. At the time, up to 33% of former students with EBD were not employed as adults (The Peacock Hill Working Group, 1991). Their research implied

that interventions should take place not only in school but throughout the lifetime of the person with the disability. Specific recommendations included increasing the availability of services for students with EBD, increasing cross-agency collaboration, and creating programs that offer long term supports for these students through adulthood (The Peacock Hill Working Group, 1991).

In 1997, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act became the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA ensured that school districts provided an individualized FAPE to all students with disabilities. This was to be done through an individualized education plan (IEP) that highlighted a student's strengths, needs, and involvement in the general education curriculum. In addition, schools were also responsible for working with the student, guardian(s), and other relevant service providers to create a transition plan from high school to post-secondary education, employment, and independent living. Moving into the 21st century, IDEA was reauthorized in 2004. Changes made included a larger emphasis on transition planning for individuals with disabilities (Johnson, n.d.).

The NLTS2 is a study of the outcomes of students with disabilities as they move from adolescence to adulthood. Data were collected through a series of longitudinal interviews that took place between 2001 and 2009. Results indicated that 35.5% of adults with EBD were not employed at some point between high school and up to 6 years after leaving high school (Sanford et al., 2011). These results echo the outcomes found by the Peacock Hill Working Group in 1991. At the time the NLTS2 was published there had been 20 years of progress and changes to special education law, but no positive change for the outlook of employment for those with EBD

Importance of Topic

Even with the passage and restructuring of special education laws, employment outcomes for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities have not improved in 20 years. At the time the NLTS2 was published, the unemployment rate for these adults with EBD was more than 25% higher than it was for all adults in the United States (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Although there are outside variables such as national recession or other economic factors, the percentage of adults with EBD who are unemployed continues to be higher than those who do not have disabilities. From the perspective of a teacher who works with these individuals, this is unacceptable. More research needs to be devoted to finding solutions for these outcomes. The paper intends to illuminate the current state of outcomes and provide information on solutions that can be used to improve employment outcomes for adults with EBD.

Definition of Terms

Emotional or Behavioral Disability: According to IDEA 2004, “Emotional disturbance means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child’s educational performance:

- (A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.
- (B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
- (C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.
- (D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.
- (E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

- (ii) Emotional disturbance includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance under paragraph (c)(4)(i) of this section. (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2004)

Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): Once a student qualifies for special education, they are guaranteed a free and appropriate public education designed to meet their unique needs and that prepares them for life after high school in the areas of education and training, employment, and independent living (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, n.d.).

IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act): The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act mandates that a free and appropriate public education is provided to children in the United States through special education and related services. Children ages 3-21 are eligible to receive services (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, n.d.).

IEP (Individualized Education Program): As part of FAPE, an individualized education program is developed for each student on their needs, present levels of academic and functional performance, and their amount of involvement in general education curriculum (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, n.d.).

Secondary Transition: A coordinated set of services that are designed to improve academic and functional abilities of a child in the areas of postsecondary education, vocational education, employment, independent living, and community participation (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, n.d.).

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

This literature review examines strategies and interventions designed to improve post-high school employment outcomes for individuals with EBD. Barriers that impede successful post-secondary employment for individuals with EBD are also examined. A total of 11 studies are reviewed in Chapter 2. Conclusions are drawn and recommendations are made in Chapter 3.

Successful Strategies and Interventions

The success of different programs and interventions was measured directly in some articles and indirectly in others by analyzing data from larger studies. Overall, strategies and interventions that were shown to have a positive impact on the post-high school work outcomes included implementing a specific school to work program, enrolling these individuals in Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses while in high school, and connecting them to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services.

School-to-Work Programs

As a result of the School-to-Work-Opportunities Act, an amendment of IDEA, efforts have been made to improve school to work transition skills and opportunities for students with disabilities (Nochajski & Schweitzer, 2014). Nochajski and Schweitzer developed and implemented the School to Work Transition Program (STWTP). The STWTP was developed specifically to target students with EBD to support their transition from student to employee. The goal of the project was to develop, implement, and refine a program that explored students' vocational interests, identified each students' deficits related to gaining and maintaining successful employment, taught vocational skills, established an individual employment goal for each participant, and connected students and families with opportunities and supports in the community (Nochajski & Schweitzer, 2014). To create a framework for this

model, the guiding principles of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act were considered along with “best practices” identified by the authors that were correlated with employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Best practices include vocational intervention, paid work experience, social skills curriculum, interagency collaboration, parent involvement, and individualized planning.

The 47 participants in this project were adolescents and young adults with EBD who attended a private day treatment program in western New York. The students were from 12 different urban, rural, and suburban school districts. A majority of the participants (75%) were male, and 66% of the participants were white. Their attendance at the facility was a result of their severe behaviors which led to them being removed from the public school setting.

The STWTP consisted of four phases. Phase 1 was school-based learning. It included creating awareness of career options as well as teaching the work habits and social skills necessary to be successful in the work environment. Students attended hour-long sessions two times per week for 3 months to learn skills in job exploration, work habits, community living skills, self-care, and social skills. Competencies taught in Phase 1 were based on curriculum from the Secretary’s Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills and the 40 Developmental Assets for Adolescents.

Phase 2 was community involvement. During this 3-month phase, students volunteered once a week for 2 to 4 hours at placements in the community based on their interests. The start of this placement happened concurrently with the school-based learning in Phase 1. Students continued receiving services through classroom time once a week. In addition, they were given individualized on-the-job coaching by project personnel. These job coaches provided support for

students in applying and generalizing the classroom skills developed in Phase 1 to the volunteer setting in Phase 2.

In Phase 3, students transitioned to supported, paid work experience. Over 10 weeks, students earned minimum wage and worked up to eight hours per week. Project personnel assisted students in problem-solving and communication related to their placements, educated employers, and provided on-the-job support as necessary. At this stage, peer role models who had completed the STWTP were also used to offer support and encouragement.

After Phase 3, the students took one of two pathways. If they were successful in Phase 3 students moved on to Phase 4, independent employment. They were offered part-time employment by their employer and had the opportunity to become a peer mentor for students in Phase 3. If not successful in Phase 3 students had the option of receiving continued, supported work experience.

The results of the study were mixed, but it did yield positive outcomes for some participants. Most students (68%) were successful in Phase 1 and Phase 2 but were not able to complete Phase 3. Only 34% of the original participants were able to complete Phase 3, but 81% of the students who completed this phase were hired independently of the STWTP.

Although there is no longitudinal data for long term effects of the STWTP, studies (e.g., Enayati & Karpur, 2019) suggested success can be generalized. The researchers were interested in determining the effects of participation in school to work transition (STW) programs on employment outcomes for youth with disabilities who were also in households that were receiving welfare support. Using a regression model that allowed for the control of independent variables, the authors analyzed a subset of data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health which included 6,952 adolescents and young adults with disabilities. They

concluded that youth with disabilities who participated in an STW program while in high school were 8% more likely to be employed as an adult than individuals with disabilities who did not participate in an STW program.

Post-Secondary Transition Exposure and Opportunities

Wagner, Newman, and Javitz (2017) examined the relation between taking career and technical education (CTE) courses in high school and the post-high school employment status of individuals with emotional disturbances (ED). They used a subset of data from the NLTS2. To be included in this study, a participant needed to qualify for and receive special education services under the ED label, to attend a public high school, and to have at least one parent or student participate in an interview/survey after leaving high school. Of the 11,000 high school students included in the NLTS2, about 350 youth met the criteria to be included in this study. Of these participants, 76% of these individuals were male, and 59.4% were white.

To determine if CTE courses had been taken in high school, student transcripts were used. The CTE information from the transcripts was coded using a dichotomous variable that indicated if an individual had taken at least one general CTE course while in high school, or if the individual had taken a concentration of four or more occupationally specific courses. Researchers were interested in determining the employment outcomes for individuals within the first 2 years of leaving high school, and then any time between 2 and 8 years after leaving high school to determine the short- and long-term effects of having taken CTE courses.

The propensity score method was used to determine the predicted probability of the variables of interest using a weighted logistic regression model. Approximately 90% of high school students with ED took CTE courses while in high school, but only 25% took a

concentration of four or more occupationally specific CTE courses. The results were mixed and indicated that students who took a concentration of CTE courses had significantly higher odds of being employed within the first two years of leaving high school; however, these results were not sustained in the 2 to 8-year period after high school. Taking fewer than four CTE courses did not have a statistically significant effect on whether or not an individual was employed. The results of this investigation demonstrate that students with ED who take at least four occupational-specific CTE courses while in high school have higher odds of gaining employment upon exiting high school. The authors further argue that for students to take such a concentration of classes, transition planning should start early in a students' career to accommodate the time needed to take such courses.

Cimera, Burgess, and Bedesem (2014) supported early transition planning. The authors investigated the effects of transition planning beginning at age 14 or age 16 on post-secondary work outcomes for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Using data from the Rehabilitation Services Administration, the researchers randomly identified two identical groups of 7,520 people. The variables of age, gender, ethnicity, level of education, severity of disability, and primary and secondary disability were controlled so that each of the two sample groups would have the same characteristics. The independent variable in this study was the age by which transition had to be addressed on the individual's IEP—either age 14 (the “early transition” group) or age 16 (the “later transition” group). Data from 2006-2009 were analyzed.

In each year examined, the group of individuals from the early transition group were significantly more likely to be employed than individuals from the later transition group. Individuals with intellectual disabilities who start transition planning by age 14 are significantly

more likely (74.3%) to have post-high school employment than those who start transition planning at age 16 (57.8%).

Cimera et al. (2014) had replicated a study done by Cimera, Burgess, and Wiley in 2013, which examined the effect of the age of transition planning in individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder. The results of that study also indicated that individuals who lived in states that mandated transition planning by age 14 were more likely to be employed than individuals who lived in states that mandated transition planning by age 16.

June, Osmanir, Kortering, and Zhang (2015) examined the effects that participating in Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs had on individuals with disabilities. The purpose of Vocational Rehabilitation is to implement employment-related services (i.e., job readiness training, job placement assistance, etc.) to individuals with disabilities. The researchers sought to determine whether or not participation in VR affected employment outcomes. The authors used data from the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services (ODRS) database, which included 7,587 individuals who had applied for services between 1981 and 2012. A majority of these individuals (72%) were high school-aged when they applied for and received VR services.

Using statistical measures, the researchers determined that the age of the individual when starting the VR program and the length of attending the VR program had a positive impact on employment outcomes, indicating that the younger the participant was when starting VR and the longer they were in the program, the more successful they were as adults. The authors suggest that support from VR is important in helping individuals with disabilities transition from the high school to post-high school setting but recognize that limited research has been done to support this claim.

Employer, Student, and Parent Opinions

Employers, students, and parents have perceptions and opinions regarding the success of transition programs for individuals with EBD. Walsh (2010) sought to identify the components that employers believed necessary in providing and implementing effective transition programs for high school students with EBD. Walsh interviewed seven employers in eastern Pennsylvania who worked with students with EBD in an on-site job training setting. She used a phenomenological approach to collect qualitative research and deduce the meaning of the employers' perceptions. The employers had between two and 35 years of experience at their current jobs. Two of the job sites had established on-site training programs for more than a decade, and the other five had programs that had been created within the past few years. Consultants from each of the 29 Pennsylvania Intermediate Units were sent surveys. Of the 29 regions, consultants from 10 regions responded to the survey. Eight out of 10 of those regions had specific transition programs for the population of interest. For the convenience of the researcher, four regions were chosen.

Consultants from each region were contacted, and the researcher took recommendations from each consultant in order to acquire subjects. Ultimately, the seven employers that were chosen were from job sites including a nursing home, a college dining hall, a retail store, a music store, a bakery, a candy company, and an auto club. The researcher met each employer at their respective job sites and conducted hour long, four-segment interviews that took place over 1 day. The first interview segment was to determine background information about the job sites. The second interview segment investigated the training program that both students and employers followed. The third explored factors that affected student performance, and the fourth examined which qualities determined that one student was more effective than another. The researcher

used a semi-structured protocol to interview each employer and a professional transcriptionist transcribed each tape-recorded interview.

Comparative analysis was used to recognize patterns within the data to cluster them into categories. Foci included two questions. The first question was: “What components make a transition program successful for students with emotional disturbances?” The second question was: “Do the current educational programs adequately serve students with emotional disturbances?” (Walsh, 2010, p. 129)

The employers reported several factors that contribute to program efficacy. First, a transition program should provide students and employers with a thorough introduction to the program. Second, orientation, communication, and collaboration between the job site and school are crucial. Third, issues related to pay for students and provisions for transportation of students between work and school must be resolved. Employers shared that the current strengths of programs were that many students gained full-time employment as a direct result of the training program and that students improved their skills and self-confidence.

Stein, Connors, Chambers, Thomas, and Stephan (2016) evaluated the effectiveness of the Healthy Transitions Initiative (HTI) program in Maryland as reported by youth, parents/guardians, and HTI staff. The goal of the HTI program is to improve outcomes for transition-age youth. Youth with EBD between the ages of 16 to 25 participated in the HTI program. Among other services such as social skills coaching and educational support, participants engaged in Supported Employment.

External evaluators conducted a longitudinal program evaluation using quantitative and qualitative means. Youth, parents/guardians, and HTI staff were each given two interviews by the evaluation team. The interviews were conducted in a group format and lasted 60 to 130

minutes. Eleven youth, seven parents/guardians, and six HTI staff members participated in the interviews. The protocol used for conducting interviews contained seven to nine open-ended questions. Transcripts from the interviews were analyzed using ATLAS.ti, which identified codes and categories based on the answers given.

One of the categories that emerged after data analysis was completed was beneficial program components and characteristics. Participants identified that comprehensive case management was one of the keys to the success of the program. In addition, the importance of services being individualized and driven by each youth was also believed to be integral to the success of the program. Last, participants explained that the flexibility of case managers (being able to meet at non-traditional times and locations) was important in the success of the program.

School-to-work programs have been found to be effective for students with disabilities. In addition, having a high school program that involves a concentration of CTE classes has also been determined to increase the likelihood of adult employment for individuals with EBD. Access to VR services has also been shown to have positive employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Employers, youth, program staff, and parents/guardians also offered their perceptions regarding the successful transition from high school to adult employment.

Barriers to Success

While reviewing strategies and interventions that can increase success for individuals with EBD, several barriers were also identified in the literature. Such barriers were the rate of service receipt, student perceptions and knowledge of their skills and needs, and teacher training. Parents, students, and employers also identified what they saw as barriers.

Rate of Service Receipt

Although there are strategies and interventions proven to have positive impacts on individuals with EBD, there are also barriers to success. Wagner, Wei, Thorton, and Valdes (2016) examined the rate in which individuals with emotional disturbances (ED) received services provided by school districts during high school and up to 8 years after exiting high school. Using sample data from the NLTS2, researchers isolated individuals who received special education services under the ED label while attending a public high school. These individuals had to have data on service receipt reported at least once during high school and once post-high school. Out of the over 11,000 students included in the NLTS2, 550 individuals met the criteria set for the focus of this study.

The sample used in this study was 74% male and 62.2% white, with a mean age of 17.1 while they were in high school. On average, the individuals from this sample had been out of high school for 4.5 years by the time the last data point was collected. Parents—followed by the sample population themselves, once they no longer lived with parents—reported via telephone interview or mail questionnaire the number and type of services received both in and out of high school. The types of services students reported receiving were mental health services/ counseling, vocational services, case management, in-home or in class-aide, special transportation, medical/health services related to disability, occupational therapy, none, speech and language, and/or educational assistance. Data were weighted to represent the full population of youth with ED.

The researchers used the SAS PROC SURVEY Taylor Series Linearization method to address the sampling design and account for standard errors. Statistical measures were used to identify the significant differences between the receipt of services while in high school versus the receipt of services received after high school. Results indicated that overall, individuals with ED

received significantly fewer services after exiting high school. Approximately 83% of students with ED reported having received services while in high school, with only 66.2% of these individuals receiving services after high school.

The most significant decreases in the rate of service receipt were in the areas of case management, in-home or in-class aides, special transportation, and speech and language services. In addition, a significantly higher number of parents and individuals with ED reported having problems getting information about the availability and eligibility of service requirements after high school than in high school. Individuals with ED reported being further impacted by not being eligible for services once exiting high school, with 8.3% of these individuals reporting that they no longer qualified for services.

In the discussion section of this study, authors address data from the NLTS2 that indicates that 54.2% of youth with ED who were enrolled in a postsecondary school revealed that they did not believe they had a disability. The authors speculate that this lack of self-awareness is an obstacle that could keep these individuals from accessing services.

Student Perceptions and Knowledge of Transition-Related Skills and Needs

Students' lack of self-awareness with regard to their disability, as well as their related strengths and needs, were studied by Carter et al. (2009). Researchers were interested in determining the extent to which, if any, transition assessments filled out by educators, parents, and youth with disabilities deviated from one another with regard to the students' strengths and needs. The study sample was 160 high school students with EBD or Learning Disabilities (LD). Specifically, 59 of the students qualified for special education services under the EBD label and the remaining 101 qualified as LD, with the mean age being 17.2 years old. Most participants

were male (68.8%). The authors noted that the sample was overrepresented by European Americans when compared to the national population of students with these disabilities. There were 99 teachers with roles of special educator, general educator, case manager, or related service provider who participated in this study, with a vast majority being special educators (90.9%). Participants attended or worked at one of 29 public schools in a Midwestern state.

The Transition Planning Inventory (TPI) was used to assess transition-related strengths and needs. The TPI is a formal tool that is made up of 46 items related to employment, further education and training, daily living skills, leisure activities, community participation, health, self-determination, communication, and interpersonal relationships. Answers are recorded on a 6-point Likert-type scale, with 0 being “strongly disagree” and 5 being “strongly agree.” Parents, students, and teachers were asked to fill out the form with regard to the individual student’s strengths and needs. Out of the sample population of 160 students, 69 complete assessments (forms completed by parents, students, and teachers) were returned.

To analyze the results, researchers used two-way mixed analysis of variance to determine differences in responses by each respondent (parent, teacher, or student). Results indicated that across all nine domains assessed, student ratings were significantly higher than both parent and teacher ratings. The results of teachers and parents did not differ significantly. This study demonstrates that students have higher perceptions of their transition-related abilities than their parents and teachers, and this could result in them not accessing support services as they transition to the post-secondary setting.

Harrison et al. (2017) investigated student knowledge of the IEP process and post-secondary goals. First, they examined the extent to which students with disabilities participated in the IEP process. Second, they determined if students had knowledge of their post-secondary

employment and training goals on IEPs. Then, they evaluated the extent to which there was agreement between the students' post-secondary IEP goals and the actual plans of the student.

Although this study was not limited to individuals with EBD, each participant did have social, emotional, or behavioral problems. Researchers used data from a larger study completed by the *Center for Adolescent Research in Schools—CARS*. This larger data set included students from 54 high schools across the states of Kansas, Missouri, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina. Individuals included in the study experienced social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties as reported by parent and teacher ratings. To be included in this study, participants needed to be between the ages of 14 and 18, be on an IEP, and have completed *CARS Transition Survey*. A total of 93 students met these criteria.

Students were given the *CARS Transition Survey- Student Version* interviews by project personnel. Each survey contained six items—three “yes” or “no” questions and three short answers. The authors of this study coded interviews into a coding document that was dependent on individual responses. Results indicated that 73% of students attended IEP meetings. However, only 59% of students reported that they could list their post-secondary IEP goals as stated in the IEP. Of this, only 33% of the student responses matched what was written on the IEP. In addition, only 38% of students expressed that their current post-secondary employment goals matched what was listed on their IEP. The authors conclude that student participation in the IEP process is limited and that the planning for post-secondary employment is deficient due to student plans and knowledge not matching with what is written on the IEP.

Employer, Student, and Parent Opinions

Walsh (2010) also examined areas employers felt needed refinement. Employers reported that to increase success more businesses in the area needed to be involved and that students should be matched with jobs in an area of interest. In addition, they felt that there was a need for clarification of the roles and responsibilities for both employers and employees. They also felt that employers need to be prepared for difficult situations that they may encounter when working with students with EBD.

The recommendations of parents and students for program improvements are also included by Stein et al. (2016). The participants completed interviews on the HTI program and shared their opinions on beneficial program components and recommendations for enhancement. Participants indicated there should be more social activities for youth to develop friendships and more support and information for caregivers regarding resources. Additionally, parents and students felt there was a need for increased resources, particularly program personnel.

Teacher Training

Morningstar and Benitez (2013) sought to determine which variables are likely to influence the frequency in which special educators engage in transition-related planning, activities, and services with their students. Using a database of 35,000 secondary special educators from 31 states, 1,800 participants were randomly selected from four disability groups (LD, EBD, Intellectually Disabled, and non-categorical high incidence). The rate at which teachers were chosen from each disability area matched the proportion as listed by the Department of Education in 2008. To collect data, the researchers created the *Secondary Teachers' Transition Survey* (STTS), which comprised of 46 questions that fell into one of the following domains: *Instructional Planning*, *Curriculum and Instruction*, *Transition Planning*, *Assessment*, *Collaboration*, and *Additional Competencies*. Questions were answered using a

4-point Likert-Type scale, with 1 being *never* or *very underprepared* and 4 being *frequently* or *very prepared*. Survey packets that included the STTS form and a cover letter explaining the study were mailed to participants. There were 557 valid surveys returned.

The average number of transition-related college courses taken per respondent was 1.07. Outside of college, the average number of transition-related professional development hours received by each staff member was 28, with each staff member having taught for an average of 17 years. This amounts to an average of 1.64 hours of transition-related staff development per year. Moreover, 14% of respondents reported that they had not ever attended any professional development regarding transition. Regarding the level of preparation received to conduct transition-related activities, respondent answers fell between *somewhat unprepared* to *somewhat prepared*. The frequency with which transition activities were conducted with students fell in the *rarely* to *occasionally* range. There were significant, positive correlations between the variables of frequency of performing transition activities, perceptions of teacher preparation, and preparation experiences. This indicates that the more preparation experiences a teacher had and the more prepared they perceived themselves to be, the more likely they were to engage in a transition-related activity with students.

Table 1*Summary of Chapter 2 Findings*

AUTHOR(S)	STUDY DESIGN	PARTICIPANTS	PROCEDURE	FINDINGS
Carter, Trainor, Sun, & Owens (2009)	Quantitative	59 adolescent students with EBD and 101 students with LD, 99 teachers, parents	Parents, teachers, and students were given the <i>Transition Planning Inventory</i> (TPI), which consists of 46-items related to transition skills and behaviors	Students rated themselves significantly higher in their abilities than teachers or parents across all transition 9 domains on the TPI. Parent and teacher ratings did not differ significantly from each other.
Cimera, Burgess, & Bedesem (2014)	Quantitative	7,520 young adults with intellectual disabilities from states where transition planning starts at age 14 and 7,520 young adults with intellectual disabilities from states where transition planning starts at age 16	Data from the Rehabilitation Services Administration were analyzed using statistical measures	Individuals from states where transition planning starts at age 14 are significantly more likely to become employed as adults than those from states where transition planning starts at age 16.
Enayati & Karpur (2019)	Quantitative	A subset of data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, which included 6,952 individuals, adolescents, and young adults	Data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health were analyzed using statistical measures	Youth with disabilities who participated in a School to Work Program in high school were 8% more likely to be employed as adults than their peers.

Table 1 (continued)

AUTHOR(S)	STUDY DESIGN	PARTICIPANTS	PROCEDURE	FINDINGS
Harrison, State, Wills, Custer, & Miller (2017)	Quantitative	93 parents and students	Students were given interview questions that required “yes” or “no” answers to determine the degree of knowledge and involvement in the IEP process and transition goals.	73% of students attended IEP meetings, but 59% said they could list their post-secondary goals as written. When questioned, 33% could list the goal as written. 38% listed goals that did not match the IEP.
Nochajski & Schweitzer (2013)	Quantitative	47 teenaged students with EBD who attend a day treatment program in an urban area in western New York	A program was implemented in four phases. Phase 1 was school-based learning, phase 2 was community involvement, phase 3 was paid work experience, and phase 4 was independent employment.	While most students (91%) were able to complete phase 1, this number dropped to 68% in phase 2. The biggest drop was between phase 2 and phase 3, as only 34% of students were able to complete phase 3. Eighty-eight percent of the students that completed phase 3 were hired on for independent employment in phase 4.
Morningstar & Benitez (2013)	Qualitative	55 middle and high school special educators from 31 states across the United States	Participants were given the <i>Secondary Teachers' Transition Survey</i> , which included 46 questions that utilized a Likert-type scale related to transition planning, assessment, collaboration, and instruction. Surveys were mailed to participants.	There were positive correlations between the variables of frequency of performing transition activities, perceptions of teacher preparation, and preparation experiences.

Table 1 (continued)

AUTHOR(S)	STUDY DESIGN	PARTICIPANTS	PROCEDURE	FINDINGS
Stein, Connors, Chambers, Thomas, & Stephan (2016)	Qualitative	11 primarily teenaged youths, 7 parents/guardians, and 6 staff members	Participants were given interviews that were between 60 and 130 minutes long to determine their thoughts and opinions about programming	Beneficial program components included student-centered case management provided by adults who were caring, flexible, and committed. Recommendations for program enhancement included providing more opportunities for positive social interaction and having more personnel to help with case management activities.
Wagner, Newman, & Javitz (2017)	Quantitative	A subset of data from the NLTS2 was used. Participants had to qualify for services under the EBD label, attend a public school, and had to have taken at least one CTE course in high school. 350 individuals met the criteria, and were predominantly white males	High school transcript data were analyzed using statistical measures	Nine out of 10 students with EBD took at least one CTE course, but only 25% took a concentration (four or more). Those who had taken at least four CTE classes had significantly higher odds of obtaining full-time employment in the first two years after high school than those who took fewer than four
Wagner, Wei, Thorton, & Valdes (2016)	Quantitative	550 predominantly white male individuals with ED who attended secondary schools and had data on service receipt reported at least one time by parents during high school and at least one time after high school	Telephone interviews and mailed questionnaires were given to parents and students, once they reached the age of majority to determine if they had received services after high school, and how hard it was to find services	Students on average received 2.6 services during high school, but only 1.8 services after high school. In the post-high school years, it was significantly harder for parents to find and qualify for services. And lastly, the longer students were out of high school, the larger the decrease in the receipt of services.

Table 1 (continued)

AUTHOR(S)	STUDY DESIGN	PARTICIPANTS	PROCEDURE	FINDINGS
Walsh (2010)	Qualitative	7 employers from seven separate job sites in Eastern Pennsylvania	Employers were interviewed by the researcher in 4 segments that took place on one day over approximately one hour. Comparative analysis was used for cross-case responses and thematic analysis was used to recognize patterns.	Employers determined that for a transition program to be successful, it should provide a thorough introduction and orientation to students, be paid, provide opportunities for transportation, and have strong communication between school and work. Employers felt that the strengths of existing programs were that many students transitioned to full-time employment, improved skills, and gained self-confidence. To improve the program, employers felt that the schools could involve more businesses, clarify roles and responsibilities, and prepare employers for difficult situations.

Chapter 3: Conclusions and Recommendations

This review examined post-secondary employment strategies and interventions for individuals with EBD. Chapter 1 provided a foundation for the topic and established the mechanisms used to cultivate research articles. Chapter 2 provided research on interventions and strategies that can be used to improve outcomes, as well as barriers to success that were found while researching the topic. In this chapter, conclusions are drawn, recommendations for future research are made, and an explanation of how my practice will be impacted is given.

Conclusions

Four studies determined that the more exposure that students and teachers had to transition supports, the more successful the outcome. Wagner et al. (2017) concluded that if an individual with EBD took at least four Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses while in high school, they were more likely to be employed as adults. Cimera et al. (2014) determined that students with intellectual disabilities have better vocational outcomes as adults if they start transition planning at age 14 rather than age 16. June et al. (2015) studied the effect that participation in Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs had on individuals with disabilities. Results indicated that the longer one was connected to VR services, the better the employment outcome. The positive impact being more connected to support and training was not only limited to students. Morningstar and Benitez (2013) concluded that the more training and preparation a teacher had, the more likely they were to engage in transition-related activities with students.

Two studies supported school-to-work programs for students with disabilities. Nochajski and Schweitzer (2013) studied participation in the STWTP and found that students with EBD who had supported work experience were likely to be hired as independent employees. Enyati

and Karpur (2019) determined that individuals with disabilities who participated in a school to work program were 8% more likely to be employed as adults than those who did not.

The two studies by Stein et al. (2016) and Walsh (2010) provided students, parents, staff, and employers the opportunity to share strengths and concerns regarding transition programs. Strengths included increased skills for students, training that led to independent employment, and individualized services provided by case managers. Concerns reported were a lack of jobs in the area of student interests', clarification of roles for employers and employees, staff training for difficult situations they may encounter with students, and a need for increased resources.

Three studies identified barriers to successful post-secondary employment which included access to services, student knowledge and participation in the transition planning process, and student perceptions of needs. Carter et al. (2009) found that students rate themselves significantly higher on post-secondary transition-related skills than their parents or teachers, indicating that they may not have an accurate understanding of their needs. Regarding support in the post-high school setting, Wagner et al. (2016) determined that students with ED receive significantly fewer services after high school. The reasons for the decrease in service included not being eligible or not having information about the availability of services. In addition, Harrison et al. (2017) established that many students (67%) do not have accurate knowledge of the employment goals listed on the transition services pages of their IEPs. Furthermore, a large portion of students had post-secondary employment plans that did not match what was listed on their IEP. One can ascertain that if students cannot list their IEP goals or do not have goals that match what is written in their IEPs that the programming being provided to them does not support their post-secondary employment plans.

The reviewed studies had an array of limitations and delimitations. In Walsh (2010), it was not stated how many individuals were at each job site. Having more or fewer of these individuals per job site could have changed the feedback given by the employer. Nochajski and Schweitzer (2013) did not report information on individuals who did not make it past each phase with regard to why they were not successful. Thus, the factors that produced the effect cannot be fully determined. Seven of the studies (Carter et al., 2009; Enyati & Karpur, 2019; Harrison et al., 2017; Morningstar & Benitez, 2013; Stein et al., 2016; Wagner et al., 2016; Wagner et al., 2017; Walsh, 2010) were based on self-report data. Such data can be both less reliable and less valid.

Additionally, six of the studies were not exclusive to individuals with EBD (Carter et al., 2009; Cimera et al., 2014, Enyati & Kapur, 2019; Harrison et al., 2017; June et al., 2015; Morningstar & Benitez, 2013). However, I argue that if these studies were replicated to include only individuals with EBD, the results would be similar. To produce improved outcomes for this population, these studies should be replicated to use specific data from students with EBD.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are areas illuminated by this review that exist due to limitations or boundaries of the studies. Such areas merit further investigation. Nochajski and Schweitzer (2013) reported that students who complete the first three phases of the program are likely to be hired for independent employment. However, they do not specifically indicate what is done when a student is unable to complete a phase. Failure in programs and the need for additional training are not addressed. Future research could be done on the rates of independent employment for students who go back through the program. Additionally, longitudinal data should be included to determine if these individuals are employed beyond high school.

Wagner et al. (2017) concluded that if an individual with EBD took at least four CTE classes while in high school, they were more likely to be employed as an adult for up to 2 years after leaving high school. However, the results were not sustained for the period between 2 and 8 years after leaving high school. This indicates that individuals are employed on or shortly after graduation but are not able to hold employment longer than two years after graduation. More research should be done as to why these individuals are not able to keep a job for a longer period of time.

The age for initiating transition services should be studied. In states where transition planning is mandated to begin at age 14 instead of age 16, individuals with intellectual disabilities or who are on the autism spectrum have improved employment outcomes (Cimera et al., 2014). This study should be replicated with other disability populations so that an informed and uniform decision can be made across the country about whether transition planning should start at age 14 or age 16. Similarly, June et al. (2015) found that students with disabilities in Oklahoma who are connected with VR services at earlier ages and for longer periods of have more positive employment outcomes. More research should be done in this area to determine when students should be introduced to VR services.

Last, there are areas of competency needed to be a successful employee that require further review. Some of the programs discussed in this paper explicitly taught work skills to students. However, there are other prerequisite skills needed for successful employment, such as math, reading, and communication skills. Those skills should be studied to determine the correlation between them and successful employment outcomes.

Implications for Practice

After conducting this literature review, it is my responsibility as an EBD teacher to do something productive based on my findings. The reason I chose this topic is that I work with high school students who have EBD, and the transition from student to adult has not been smooth for all of my graduating seniors. After completing this literature review, I now can make more informed decisions as well as effect positive change.

The study done by June et al. (2015) concluded that the earlier one is connected with VR services, the better the employment outcome. VR comes to my building two times per month to meet with students one-on-one in 30-minute increments. They primarily meet with seniors, but if their numbers are low, they will also work with high need juniors toward the end of the school year. We are doing these students a disservice by not providing them the opportunity to meet with VR at an earlier age.

Wagner et al. (2017) determined that if a student takes four or more CTE courses while in high school, they will have improved outcomes. While my school does offer six CTE courses and a CTE internship program, many students do not begin taking such courses until they are juniors or seniors in high school. By this point, it would be hard to fit at least four CTE courses into their schedule. In 5 years of working in my building, I have only ever had two freshmen on my caseload (out of approximately 20) take a CTE course. While we do not want to “track” students and decide for them at an early age whether or not they will take a more academic or a more career-focused path, these conversations must start happening at the middle school level.

Improvements to the Work Experience Program at the school where I teach could be made. We currently have a year-long Work Experience Seminar course that teaches students

skills similar to those mentioned in the article by Nochajski and Schweitzer (2013), including thinking creatively, communication, job exploration, and money management. While taking the course, students have the opportunity to work with the Work Experience Coordinator to find a job that matches their skills and interests. Once hired, the Work Experience Coordinator checks in with the manager of each job site between 1 time per week and 1 time per month, depending on the needs and skills of the student. However, the Work Experience Coordinator does not provide job coaching to the students at their job sites. I have had students every year who have gotten fired from their jobs for various reasons, and I wonder if we had a more comprehensive program that included supported work experience if that would happen. Additionally, students typically do not take Work Experience Seminar until 11th or 12th grade. By this time, many of them already have jobs. This means that they don't have an opportunity to learn pre-employment or employment skills before they begin working. If a student is not already employed, the Work Experience Coordinator will help place them. However, the areas are not typically high interest for students and most commonly include fast-food restaurants.

Carter et al. (2009) determined that students tend to rate themselves higher on their post-secondary knowledge and skills than their parents or teachers do. It is important to determine why this is happening. If students do not have an accurate portrayal of their skills, it could impede their awareness that getting support services after high school could be in their best interest. Also, at my school, it is not common practice to do these types of instruments with students each year. They get done every three years for the special education re-evaluation, but not much outside of that. It is important to do this with students at least one time a year so that teachers can have informed conversations about students and parents regarding transition planning.

Harrison et al. (2017) found that 67% of students do not know their employment goals on their IEPs. In addition, 62% of students vocalized goals that were not coherent with the employment goals listed in their IEPs. If students are not able to list their employment goals, it may signal that they have not had adequate exposure and instruction in post-secondary employment planning. Additionally, if students' plans diverge from what is written on their IEPs, it means that the school is likely not providing them updated or appropriate planning. These transition goals should be visited more than one time per year at the IEP meeting so that the IEP team can better prepare students for their chosen career path.

Summary

In summary, being involved in school to work programs, taking at least four CTE courses, beginning transition planning at age 14, and enrolling in VR services results in improved employment outcomes for individuals with EBD. Challenges include reduced rates of service receipt, lack of student perception and knowledge of skills, and minimal teacher training in the area of post-secondary transition. Changes need to be made in order for the needs of this population to be met. More research needs to be done so that schools can provide the services needed to close the employment gap between students with EBD and the general population.

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